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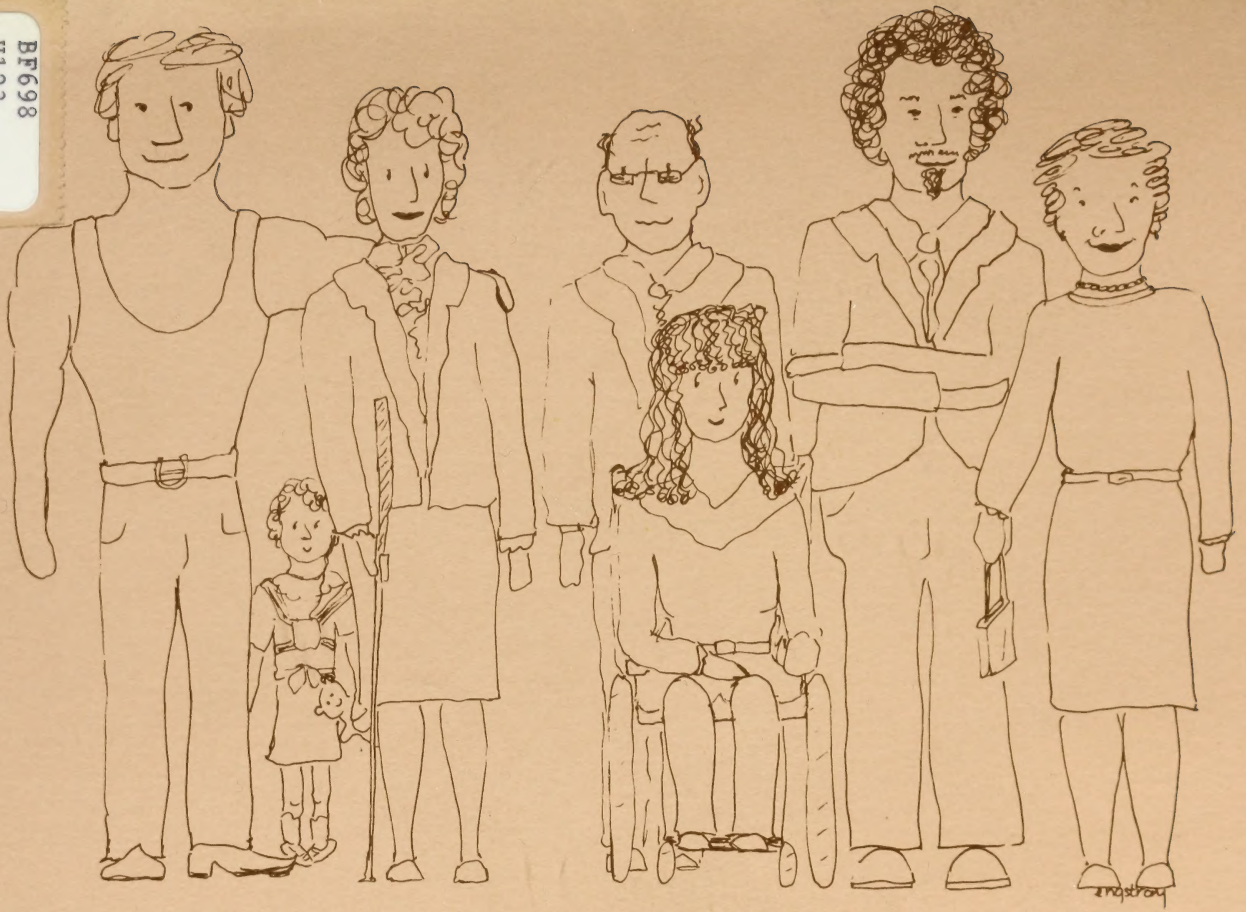

Responding to Disability: A Question of Attitude

Responding to Disability: A Question of Attitude

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Introduction

With the recent changes in laws, opportunities, and attitudes, more disabled people are moving into the mainstream, pursuing education, employment, and leisure activities. Yet few of us have had extensive exposure to disabled people. Despite our desires to respond appropriately when we interact with a person who has a disability, sometimes there is confusion, hesitancy or miscommunication.

This questionnaire is designed to stimulate thinking and dialogue. It is not intended to test your knowledge of disability or your attitudes toward disabled people. Increasingly we find ourselves in situations involving people who are disabled and we need to make quick decisions on how to respond. We're not always sure what response is best. This questionnaire will give you an opportunity to think about situations involving disabilities, to respond, and then to consider the various responses more carefully.

For each question pick the answer that you feel is best. When you have answered all 14 questions, turn to the answer section that follows. In the answer section you will find discussion regarding each of the various responses. When you are done, discuss this questionnaire with others. Ultimately in any human interaction there are not "right" or "wrong" answers.

Responding to Disability: A Question of Attitude

Question Section

I'LL HELP YA LADY
EEEEE

1. You are in a grocery store with your children when a person in an electric wheelchair enters. Your children ask in loud voices: "Why is that man sitting down?" Then they go over to him and ask: "What's wrong with you?" Your response should be:

   a) to try as discreetly as possible to get your children away from the person and to tell them it's not polite to talk like that.

   b) to explain to your children that the person has a disability and, if they want to know more, ask him if he would mind briefly telling your children what that means.

   c) to go to the person and apologize for your children's behavior while encouraging the children to come with you and to leave the man alone.

2. You see a disabled person struggling to get a package off of the floor and into her lap. You approach her and ask if she would like some assistance. She snaps angrily at you, saying that she can get it herself without your help. You conclude that:

   a) you should not have offered to help her.

   b) people who are disabled do not want assistance unless they ask for it.

   c) you have just met a disabled person in a bad mood.

   d) all of the above.

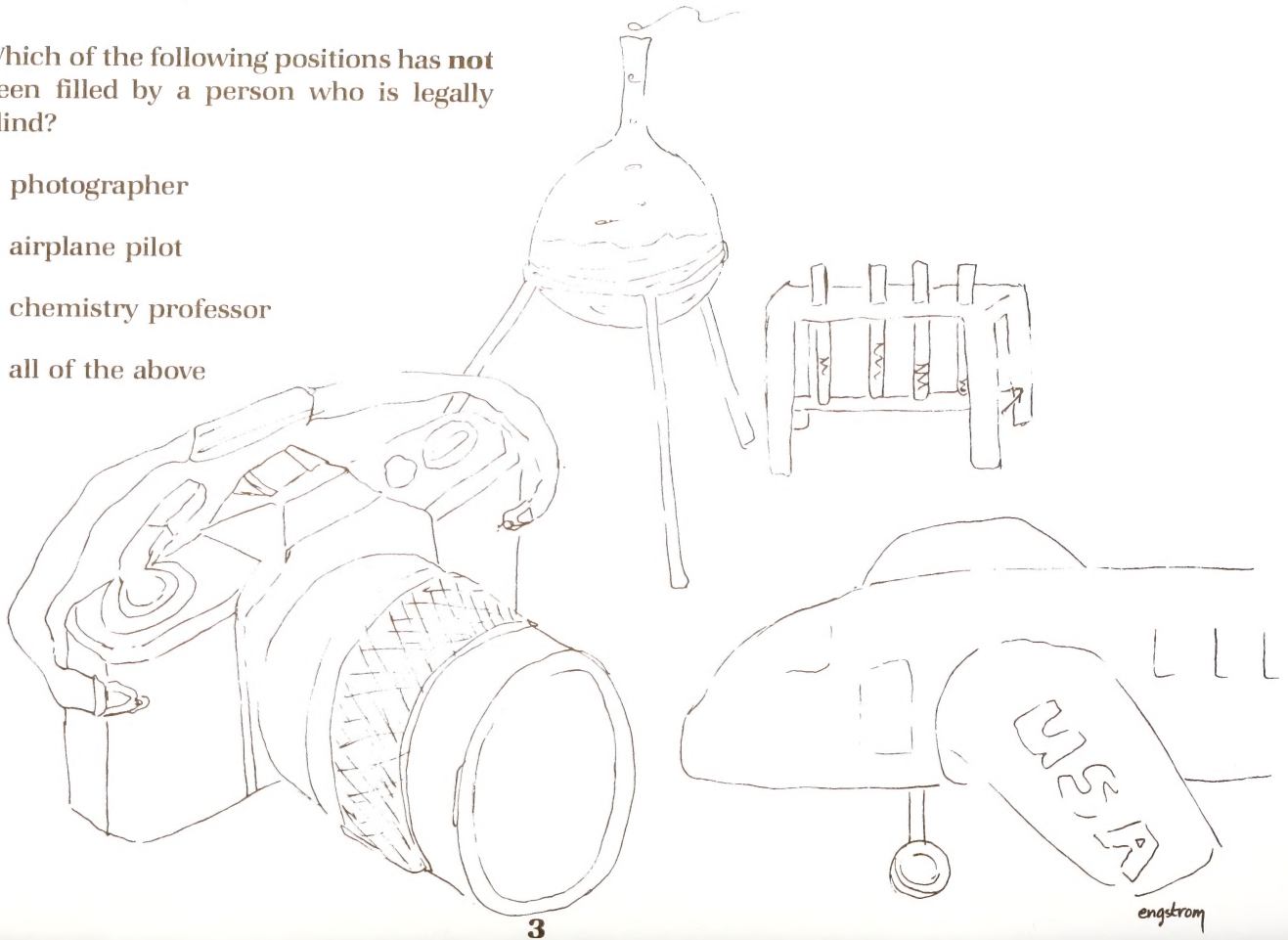
3. Which of the following positions has **not** been filled by a person who is legally blind?

a) photographer

b) airplane pilot

c) chemistry professor

d) all of the above



4. You are talking to a person with a severe speech impediment. You often have asked the person to repeat herself in order to understand what she is saying. However, the person has now repeated one phrase 4 or 5 times and you still don't understand it. You should:

a) give up and go on, assuming you will get the meaning from the context of the rest of the conversation.

b) ask again and again to have the sentence repeated, until you do understand it.

c) ask the person to spell out the word, or use an alternate word or phrase.

d) get someone else who understands the person better to come over and serve as an interpreter.

e) make a joke about the situation and laugh at your inability to understand the person.

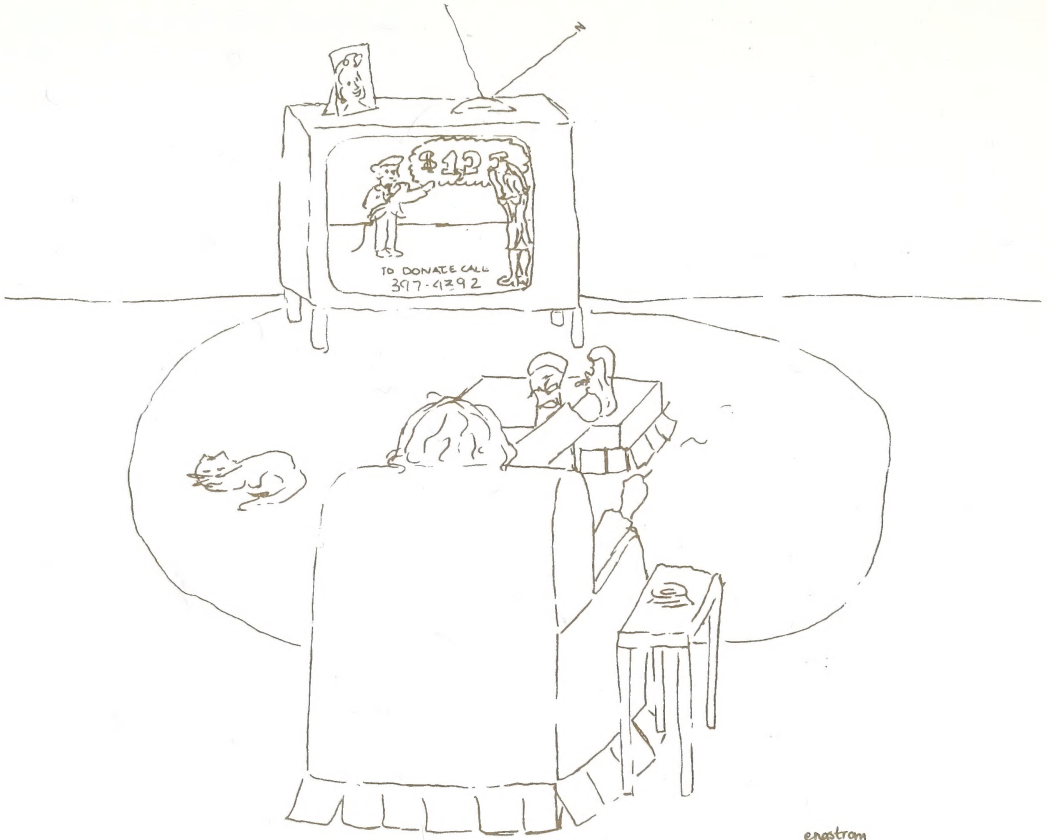
5. Because of your background with organizing church events, you are asked to serve on a committee that will be organizing a local telethon fund raiser similar to the Jerry Lewis telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. The proceeds of your local telethon will be donated to the local Association for Retarded Citizens. After agreeing to serve on the committee, you remember that you have a neighbor who has been treated for mental illness and who occasionally gives talks about mental illness. You should:

a) ask your neighbor if he would be interested in helping with the telethon so that you have consumers involved in raising the money for an organization that benefits them.

b) ask your neighbor if he would be willing to share some of his experiences with mental illness with you so that you will be more knowledgeable and sensitive when dealing with the people affiliated with the local Association for Retarded Citizens.

c) neither of the above.

d) both a and b above.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6. You are talking to a deaf person through a sign language interpreter. At the end of the conversation, you decide to talk to the interpreter. As you begin talking, the interpreter continues to sign. You stop him, saying, "You don't have to sign this." However, the interpreter ignores your request and continues to sign everything you say to the deaf person. At this point you should:

a) tell the deaf person you are having a private conversation with the interpreter and that you have asked him not to sign.

b) ask the deaf person for permission to ask a question of the interpreter; then ask the interpreter if he will have free time to talk to you later.

c) continue talking, but position yourself so that you block the deaf person's view of the interpreter.

d) politely draw the interpreter away from the deaf person and explain that you meant your conversation to be private.

e) lightly touch or hold the interpreter's hand so that he will realize that you don't want the conversation interpreted.

7. A hearing impaired person who is a good lip reader will be able to see the following percentage of spoken sounds by watching the lips of a speaker:

a) 80% - 90%

b) 40% - 50%

c) 35% or less

8. You are teaching a freshman college class in which there is one disabled student. This student is working very hard and doing the best she can. However, even her best work is only "D" quality. She is very eager to do well. You are afraid that if you give her a "D" she will get discouraged and give up. It is time for mid-term grades; you should:

   a) give her a "D" and ask her if she would like to make an appointment to discuss ways of improving.

   b) give her a "C" because she is doing well if you take into account the educational barriers she is facing.

   c) talk to her and encourage her to drop the class and enroll in an easier program of study.

9. Which of the following has **not** been heard of?

   a) a clinical psychologist who is totally deaf.

   b) a medical doctor who is a quadriplegic.

   c) a person with no arms who is a barber.

   d) a bio-medical engineer who can barely read or write due to severe dyslexia.

   e) all of the above.

   f) none of the above.

10. You are in a restaurant and you notice two deaf people sitting nearby communicating silently in sign language. When a waitress goes to their table, one person gives his order out loud, but his voice is strange, hard to understand, and too loud for the quiet restaurant. The second person does not speak, but points to items on the menu. You conclude that:

a) the first person is only deaf while the second person is deaf-mute.

b) the first person is mentally retarded as well as deaf.

c) the first person has better speech than the second and speaks for both of them.

d) some deaf people like to use their voices; other deaf people can speak, but may prefer to communicate silently.

11. Your child watches an old movie on TV. At the end of the movie a couple who are in love and have been engaged to be married tearfully break their engagement because the man has had an accident and is now a quadriplegic. Your child doesn't fully understand why the couple had to break the engagement. You explain that:

a) because of the accident the man would not be able to be a father and would not really be able to be a husband to the woman.

b) because of the accident the man won't be able to lead a normal life and will need to live in an institution where he can be taken care of.

c) you're not sure why the movie ended that way; as far as you are concerned they could have gotten married and had a fine life.

d) some movies are old and reflect inaccurate information and assumptions, i.e., that a disabled man couldn't support a wife; that a wife needs to be supported; and that disabled people don't have sexual needs.

e) both a and b above.

f) both c and d above.

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DRIVER'S
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12. The DuPont company has conducted studies of its disabled employees over a period of 25 years. Which of the following statements do you think most accurately reflects the results of these studies?

a) disabled employees ranked higher than non-disabled employees in the areas of safety, job duties and attendance.

b) disabled employees ranked the same as non-disabled employees in areas of safety, job duties and attendance.

c) in comparison to non-disabled employees, disabled employees ranked slightly higher on safety, the same on job duties, and slightly lower on attendance.

d) in comparison to non-disabled employees, disabled employees ranked slightly lower on safety and job duties but higher on attendance.

e) disabled employees ranked almost as high as non-disabled employees in the areas of safety, job duties and attendance.

13. Which of the following disabilities preclude a person from getting a driver's license?

a) deafness

b) learning disability

c) quadriplegia

d) blindness

e) epilepsy .

f) a and d above

g) all of the above

14. After explaining a complex point, you turn to your co-workers and say, "Do you see what I mean?" As soon as the words are out of your mouth, you wonder if it was inappropriate to use that phrase since one of the people you are talking to is blind. At this point you should:

a) apologize for choosing an inappropriate phrase and continue with the conversation, avoiding all future use of such phrases.

b) continue with the conversation without commenting on having used the word "see" so as not to embarrass your blind co-worker, but make a note to yourself to avoid using the word "see" around a blind person again.

c) continue talking as you always do, not worrying about whether or not you use words like "see," "walk" or "hear" around people with disabilities.

d) ask your co-worker who is blind if you should avoid using the word "see" when you are in conversations with him in the future.

OOPS! I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT!
CORPORATE $
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Responding to Disability:
A Question of Attitude

Answer Section

1

b) You should explain to your children that the person has a disability and, if they want to know more, ask him if he would mind briefly telling your children what that means.

The curiosity of children about disability is natural and should not be discouraged or apologized for. Much of our discomfort with disabilities as adults is a result of having been trained as children to avoid disabled people, not to look at them and not to talk to them. The only way for children to learn to interact naturally and comfortably with people who are disabled is for them to ask honest questions and receive honest answers.

However, you should also be sensitive to the desires of the person who is disabled. Many disabled people would be quite willing to talk with your children briefly. In fact, many would be especially pleased to see a parent who allows his or her children to interact with them naturally. However, not all disabled people would be willing to talk with your children and even those who are willing will not always have the time or inclination. Therefore, you should not be surprised if you are rebuffed upon occasion when choosing this response.

You may consider contacting local organizations of disabled people to ask if there are awareness programs that you and/or your children could attend in order to increase your exposure to and knowledge of disabled people. This would decrease the likelihood that your children would be so surprised and curious when they encounter a disabled person in public.

2

c) You have just met a disabled person in a bad mood.

Disabled people are as varied in personality, mood and temperament as able-bodied people. You cannot learn a set of rules "for dealing with disabled people," follow them faithfully, and expect never to offend a disabled person. In this case, you just met someone who either does not like to be offered assistance by able-bodied people or someone who happens to be in a bad mood for receiving assistance at that particular moment. However, that does not mean that you were in error by offering assistance. Do not assume from this one experience that all disabled people would prefer that you not offer the assistance. Many would be grateful for the offer. Some would think that you are rude or insensitive if you don't offer to help. You won't know until you ask.

Although there are no rules to follow to ensure that you won't offend, there are some guidelines that will decrease the chances of offending. First, when you see a person who looks like they could use assistance, ask them if they would like assistance. Don't assume they want it. If they do indicate that they would like assistance, ask them what you can do for them and how they would like it done. Again, don't assume you know what they want done, or the best way of doing it. This is particularly true of any personal assistance you may offer (e.g., help with putting on or taking off a coat.)

When you think a disabled person needs assistance, offer it as you would offer assistance to any other person needing assistance. There is no need to be overly helpful, cautious, patronizing, or sympathetic simply because the person is disabled. Sometimes your offer will be received with gratitude, sometimes it will be turned down politely, and sometimes it will be perceived as an insult.

3

b) airplane pilot

I have never found a reference to an airplane pilot who is blind. This does not mean that a person who is blind absolutely couldn't fly a plane, nor that it has never happened. But to the best of my knowledge it hasn't happened yet.

George Covington, a professional photographer who is blind, has written a photography manual for individuals with impaired vision, **Let Your Camera Do the Seeing** (published by the Council of Citizens with Low Vision, 1211 Connecticut Avenue N.W., Suite 506, Washington, DC 20036). Persons with severely impaired vision can use photography as a vision tool by studying greatly enlarged copies of their pictures.

Blind persons have pursued chemistry, biology, engineering and a vast array of other sciences. You will find references to such scientists, including blind chemistry professors, in the **Resource Directory of Handicapped Scientists**, compiled by Janette Alsford Owens, Martha Ross Redden and Janet Welsh Brown (AAAS Publication No. 78-13, 1978, Office of Opportunities in Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20036).

4

c) You should ask the person to spell out the word, or use an alternate word or phrase.

The only option that really is not good is to go on with the conversation without having understood what was being said. Most (not all) people with speech impediments are used to having to repeat themselves and would rather struggle to help you understand than have you pretend you understood when you didn't. It may help you relax if you remember that you are probably more frustrated and embarrassed by the process than the person with the speech impediment. You will look more foolish if you give an inappropriate answer because you pretended to understand than if you ask the person to repeat over and over, to use an alternate phrase, to spell, or to do whatever is necessary so that the two of you can continue genuinely sharing in dialogue.

If neither of the above options work, you may want to resort to option d - asking someone else to interpret - or option e - making a joke. Asking someone else to interpret can be useful if there is someone available who can understand the person better than you can. However, it is not good to rely consistently on an intrepreter rather than learning to relax and understand the person yourself. You should also not use an interpreter simply because you are in too much of a rush to take the time to understand the person yourself.

Making a joke is useful if you are talking with someone with whom you have good rapport. A joke might help relax both of you, therefore easing the communication. However, a joke may also offend. It depends both on your ability to make appropriate jokes and the other person's ability to laugh at jokes. The key here is that the joke is as much on your inability to understand as it is on the other person's inability to convey the message clearly. You have a mutual problem.

5

c) neither of the above

The idea of having consumers involved in organizing the telethon is a good one, as is the idea of talking to a consumer so that you will be more informed. However, your neighbor in this scenario is mentally ill and the fund raiser is designed to benefit persons who are mentally retarded. Mental illness is frequently and inappropriately confused with mental retardation.

Persons with mental illness have emotional problems and may experience inability to cope with the problems and stresses of life. This is not caused by their intelligence or their capacity to learn. Persons with a variety of intellectual capacities can experience mental illness. On the other hand, persons who are mentally retarded develop at a below average rate and experience unusual difficulty in learning social adjustment and economic productivity; they learn more slowly than others. Although a person who is retarded is not necessarily mentally ill, he or she may, like anyone else, become emotionally disturbed.

As often as possible it is advisable to involve disabled consumers in the development of services, programs and fund raisers that affect them. Too often programs are developed in a patronizing manner for disabled persons and end up perpetuating dependency and stereotypes. Disabled persons have many capabilities that should be drawn on and enhanced. Although the public may be responsive to donating money for "those poor, helpless people," society as a whole will benefit more if the theme of fund raisers is one of investing in the capabilities of disabled persons rather than one of taking care of the helpless.

You should therefore encourage the participation of disabled persons in organizing services and benefits that affect them. Don't assume, however, that all disabled persons are interested in or affected by any one service or benefit and don't assume that a person with one disability will automatically be interested in helping with a program designed for persons with a different disability.

6

b) You should ask the deaf person for permission to ask a question of the interpreter; then ask the interpreter if he will have free time to talk to you later.

When on duty, a sign language interpreter's professional responsibility is to translate communication, without editing or interjecting personal comments. The interpreter in this situation is therefore bound to interpret your comments and cannot engage in personal conversations particularly ones that exclude the deaf person. Even more important, however, is the point that to talk in front of a deaf person without translating the conversation is the same as whispering in front of a hearing person: it is rude, whether or not the conversation pertains to them. We all like to know what is going on around us, even if we are not being addressed directly.

On the other hand, occasions do arise when you desire to talk personally with the interpreter. In this case, you should first request permission from the deaf person to address the interpreter directly. It is courteous to do this since the interpreter is on duty. You should then proceed just as you would if you wanted to ask one member of a group of hearing people for a convenient opportunity to speak privately. However, don't be surprised if the interpreter still signs your question and his response.

Essentially, when communicating in situations involving a sign language interpreter, you will do best if you simply talk with the deaf person as you would anyone else. You should not address the interpreter, but rather the person who is deaf. If you say to the interpreter, "Would you please tell Sue that...," chances are that the interpreter will turn to Sue and sign, "Would you please tell Sue that...." Instead, you should look directly at the deaf person and say, "Sue, I want to tell you that...." The interpreter will sign for you while the deaf person watches both you and the interpreter, thus gaining a full understanding of the conversation.

7

c) 35% or less

Estimates as to the percentage of speech that is visible on the lips is 35% at the very highest. Some sounds are not visible on the lips; others are indistinguishable from other sounds (i.e., compare kiss, sis, and hiss, mother and brother, man, ban and pan.) Therefore, even those people with the best skills in lip reading will be unable to distinguish many words. In these instances meaning is often gathered from context, but much of the content of a communication may be missed or misinterpreted. Poor enunciation, moustaches, cigarettes or a tendency to turn one's back to an audience will complicate comprehension further.

For many persons who became deaf prior to age 6 or so, English is their second language. The first gestures, facial expressions, pantomine, pen and paper, interpreters, or all of the above. You may feel strange at first, but your efforts will be appreciated. A sincere attempt to communicate is generally met with success.

Whenever you know that you will be meeting with a hearing impaired person, or whenever you are arranging a public meeting or event, you should do as much as possible to arrange for a certified sign language interpreter to be present (unless the hearing impaired person makes a different request.) Some cities have agencies that facilitate contact and scheduling with interpreters. To assist you in locating the agency closest to you,

language of many deaf people is American Sign Language (ASL), a language with a linguistic structure of its own and separate from that of English. Many deaf persons have mastered the English language as well as ASL. Others have not. Those that haven't may have limited skills in reading or writing English that are not reflective of their actual level of intelligence or achievement. The range of English language competency varies from deaf person to deaf person just as it varies among hearing people.

Despite these difficulties, you should not hesitate to attempt to communicate with someone with a hearing impairment. You should speak normally. Don't exaggerate your lip movements; people are trained to read normal mouth movements. If you have difficulty with the lip reading, you may use

contact your State Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf at 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, MN 20910.

8

a) You should give her a "D" and ask her if she would like to make an appointment to discuss ways of improving.

It is both dishonest and patronizing to give a disabled person a better grade than he or she has earned. In their demand for reasonable accommodation, disabled people and their advocates are not requesting special favors or relaxed standards. If a disabled person is not competing adequately in a given situation, the situation needs to be explored honestly.

The person may be doing poorly because of the presence of artificial barriers that can be modified or eliminated. For example, this student may be doing poorly because of a lack of access to critical classroom material (i.e., an inaccessible reserve reading room, a lecture course that is not and help prepare her for the reality that sooner or later she may need to do some remedial work. If other professors are passing this student on, giving her better grades than she deserves, she may choose not to believe you. However, at some point she will need to come to grips with the reality of her performance level. The sooner this occurs, the easier it will be to remedy.

Finally, this student may be doing poorly because she is not college material. If she really wants to continue with college, despite feedback that she may not succeed, she should be allowed to try. All of us learn at least as much from our failures as from our successes. Disabled people have often

interpreted in sign language, books that have not yet been put on cassette tape or made into braille, testing procedures that have not been modified). Giving a better grade than deserved, or encouraging the student to try an easier course, would remove her from this learning situation before the situation had been explored. In some cases you might never discover that her poor performance may lie not in her disability or in her aptitude, but in artificial but overlooked educational barriers that could be modified. By making modifications that eliminate competitive disadvantages, student performance often can improve without sacrificing standards or granting special or unfair privileges.

On the other hand, this student may be doing poorly because she was not adequately prepared for college level work. Rather than passing the student on, you should give her honest feedback

been sheltered from failure and have thus missed valuable learning opportunities. Disabled people should not be set up for failure, but they should not be treated as exceptionally fragile either. We all have a "right to fail."

9

c) a person with no arms who is a barber

Although I have never heard of a barber who has no arms, after seeing the film "A Day in the Life of Bonnie Consolo"* I do believe that if a person with no arms wanted to become a barber it would be possible. The attitudes of potential clients would present far more difficulties than the mechanics of using one's feet to do the job. In the film Bonnie Consolo trims her son's hair, bakes homemade bread, slices tomatoes, writes checks and drives her car all with her feet.

You can find the names and addresses of clinical psychologists who are deaf, medical doctors who are quadriplegics and many other scientists who are disabled by consulting the **Resource Directory of Handicapped Scientists** compiled and edited by Janette Alsford Owens, Martha Ross Redden, and Janet Welsh Brown (AAAS Publication No. 78-13, 1978, Office of Opportunities in Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20036).

A little research can uncover endless examples of people with disabilities who have accomplished extraordinary achievements. While opening ourselves to recognizing the potential of disabled persons, it is also important to avoid creating new "super-crip" expectations or assumptions that all disabled people are courageous, determined or talented. Disabled people are as varied as able-bodied people: some are exceptional, many are ordinary. Not all talented disabled people will choose to pursue professional careers or succeed when they do.

*Available from Barr Films, P.O. Box 5667, Pasadena, CA 91107, (16 minute, 16mm. color film).

10

d) Some deaf people like to use their voices; other deaf people can speak, but may prefer to communicate silently.

Deaf people have voices; they are not mute. The loss of vocal production can occur in anyone, but it is a separate disability and is not automatically associated with deafness. Terms such as deaf-mute or deaf and dumb reflect the inaccurate thinking of an era when few deaf people were given opportunities to learn how to use their voices. Deaf people have impaired hearing, but their impaired hearing has nothing to do with the quality of their intelligence, their vocal cords, or their eyesight.

Learning to use one's voice to speak effectively requires time, effort, and concentration, especially for people who lost their hearing in infancy. Some deaf people choose to use their voices regularly. Others decide that this is not the best option for them. Not all deaf people who choose to use their voices will sound like hearing people when they talk. Hearing people monitor the volume, tone and expression of their speech by listening to their own voice when speaking. Deaf persons cannot do this and thus sometimes have voices that sound strange or unusual to others. Occasionally a deaf person's speech may sound similar to the speech of a person who is retarded or the speech of a person from a foreign country. However, it is not accurate to assume anything about a deaf person's intelligence or abilities by the sound of that person's voice or by that person's decision not to use his or her voice. In this case, the person who is pointing to items on the menu is effectively "speaking" for himself, even though he is not using a voice to do so.

11

f) You're not sure why the movie ended that way; as far as you are concerned they could have gotten married and had a fine life; and some movies are old and reflect inaccurate information and assumptions (i.e., that a disabled man couldn't support a wife; that a wife needs to be supported; and that disabled people don't have sexual needs).

Two common myths are that disabled people don't have sexual desires or abilities and that disabled people can't be parents. First, whether or not a disabled person can biologically parent a child varies from disability to disability and person to person. Many disabled people can have their own biological children. Even for the others, an inability to have biological children certainly does not preclude one from becoming a successful parent. More and more frequently disabled people are having children, adopting children and winning custody of children.

Despite the tendency of society to view disabled people as asexual, the sexual needs and desires of disabled people are not different from those of nondisabled people. The ability to "perform" sexually varies from disability to disability and from person to person. In general, the ability to perform sexually is less impaired than is often assumed.

Of greater significance is the realm of relationships and sexuality which goes far beyond the ability to perform specific sex acts. Using definitions of sexuality and sexual needs accepted within the field of sex therapy, one would find very little that would be seriously affected by the presence of a disability. Many disabled people lead sexually satisfying lives and are equally able to satisfy the sexual needs of their partners. And, of course, disabled people certainly do not need to look only toward other disabled people in their search for a sexual partner. A popular movie which portrayed these issues accurately and sensitively is **Coming Home** starring Jane Fonda and Jon Voight.

12

c) In comparison to nondisabled employees, disabled employees ranked slightly higher on safety, the same on job duties and slightly lower on attendance.

DuPont collected new data in 1981; this data confirmed the results found in earlier studies. Supervisors at DuPont were asked to rate their disabled employees and a matching sample of nondisabled employees in safety, performance of job duties and attendance. 96 percent of the disabled employees were rated average or above average by their supervisors in the area of safety whereas only 92 percent of the nondisabled employees were rated average or above average in safety. Supervisors rated 92 percent of disabled employees average or above on performance of job duties in comparison with 91 percent of nondisabled employees. In the area of attendance, 85 percent of the disabled employees were rated average or above while 91 percent of nondisabled employees were rated average or above. You can receive a copy of DuPont's report on this study, **Equal To the Task** by contacting: E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, Public Affairs Department, 8084 DuPont Building, Wilmington, DE 19898.

This confirms what employers across the country have already learned: disabled persons placed in appropriate jobs are just as reliable, productive and safe as other employees. As with any population, some workers will be better than others. The central point is that a person's disability is not related to whether or not that particular person will make a good employee.

13 d) blindness

As far as I know, blind people cannot get driver's licenses. However, many blind people have taken cross country bicycle trips. I have even heard a report that in Sweden people who are blind drive trucks in restricted settings by using earphones. I haven't been able to verify this report.

People who are deaf can and do drive cars. Although hearing people usually rely on their hearing for driving cues, hearing is certainly not necessary. A hearing person driving in summer with the windows up and air conditioning and radio on is no different from a deaf person.

People who are quadriplegics, people with no arms and even people who are very spastic are able to drive with the use of adaptive technology. Technology has developed to the point that virtually anyone with the desire and with access to sufficient funds to purchase the hand or foot controls best for them can drive their own vehicle.

Epilepsy is a condition that can very often be controlled through medication. Laws vary from state to state but generally after one year without a seizure and with a doctor's signature, a person

Having a learning disability does not automatically preclude a person from driving a car. People with learning disabilities have normal or above normal intelligence, normal eyesight and normal hearing, but they have trouble learning in the way others do because of difficulties in understanding or using spoken or written language or performing mathematical operations. Some people with learning disabilities learn to drive successfully; others don't. The extent to which a learning disability interferes with the ability to drive varies from person to person since there are many types of learning disabilities. Some learning disabled people may need to take longer to learn how to drive and to relax while driving. Each person needs to find the compensation techniques and learning style that work best for him or her.

with epilepsy can get a regular driver's license. Sometimes states also require the license to be renewed more frequently than the standard time period so as to check to be sure the person's seizures are still under control.

14

c) You should continue talking as you always do, not worrying about whether or not you use words like "see," "walk," or "hear" around people with disabilities.

All languages have idioms, phrases and expressions with meanings different from the literal translation. Phrases like "do you see what I mean" or "I hear what you are saying" do not literally refer to seeing or hearing. Because of this, people with disabilities tend to use these phrases as much as others. A person who is blind can certainly "see what you mean" because the phrase really means "do you understand or comprehend my point; am I being clear?"

A person who uses a wheelchair can "take a walk around the park" because that phrase refers to moving around on a stroll more than it refers to the actual process of placing one foot in front of

Persons who are deaf have been referred to as "deaf-mute" or as "deaf and dumb"; persons who use wheelchairs have been referred to as "invalids"; persons who are retarded have been referred to as "poor things" and "vegetables." These phrases are inaccurate and reflect the stereotypical thinking of a time when little was known about disabilities and the capabilities of persons with disabilities. Besides eliminating use of inaccurate labels, it is also appropriate to eliminate use of phrases that undercut a person's dignity. Referring to a person with a disability as a "wheelchair person" or a "cripple" is neither accurate nor respectful.

In short, some changes do need to occur in our

another. Sometimes a person who uses a wheelchair may prefer to use the phrase "take a wheel around the park." However, it would be inappropriate to carefully monitor your speech to eliminate use of any words or phrases such as this. That would tend to produce an unnatural stiffness and awkwardness in your speech. Relaxing and talking naturally when you are with people who are disabled is essential to acceptance of disabilities and people who have disabilities. Being overly conscious of a disability can cause discomfort and awkwardness on everyone's part.

Although it is not necessary to stiffly screen out use of any idioms with physical reference when talking to persons with disabilities, it is useful to examine the labels we use when referring to persons with disabilities to identify potentially inaccurate assumptions underlying such labels.

use of language. However, it is not necessary to bend over backwards, becoming self conscious and stiffly avoiding use of common idioms. Speak naturally and ask what phrase is most appropriate if you are unsure.

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